CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

MAY 17 1963

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From the Bookshelf

The Landscape of Treason .... By Ernest S. Pisko

Treason in the Twentieth Century, by Margret Boveri. New York: G. Putnam's Sons. 370 pp. $5.95.

The Traitors, by Alan Moorehead. New York: Harper & Row. 236 pp. $5.

Anatomy of Spying, by Ronald Seth. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 363 pp. $5.95.

A Short Course in the Secret War, by Christopher Felix. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 314 pp. $5.

A Short History of Espionage, by Colonel Allison Ind, U. S. Army Intelligence, Ret. New York: David McKay Company. 337 pp. $5.50.

Few words leave so bitter a taste in the mouth as "treason" and "traitor." Few are as apt to spark passionate controversies, turn friends into opponents, split a nation, inflame world opinion.

The dictionary defines a traitor as one who betrays a person, a cause, a trust or a country. This definition begs the key question. It ignores that, more often than not, what a certain group at a certain time has condemned as treason has been hailed by another group as heroism.

Not many cases of treason are as clear-cut as that of the Athenian Alcibiades who, out of thwarted ambition, went over to the Spartans and later the Persians. Most fall into the category of contrasting verdicts. Washington, Jefferson, Franklin, the Adamses were traitors to the British Government. When Schiller wrote the motto "In tyrannos" under the title of his play, "Die Räuber," and fled from Württemberg, he was a traitor to his sovereign, Duke Karl Ludwig.

As Margret Boveri puts it in "Treason in the Twentieth Century": "Men, hanged yesterday as traitors, are today's heroes and martyrs." She quotes John Steinbeck on juvenile gangs: "The boy who refuses to 'rat' to the police is a criminal. The boy who refuses to tell what he knows to the enemy is a hero." She calls it "the highest form of insanity when a man who happens to have been born in Leipzig is a traitor if he sympathizes with the capitalist system, and the man born in Heidelberg is a traitor if he spreads Communist ideas." These and many other identical cases she lists in order to show "the hidden relationships between the opposites in various fields of human endeavor" and she stresses the rediscovery of this coexistence of opposites as "one of the most urgent tasks of our time."

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Mrs. Boveri's study of treason in our time is not the first of its kind. But it is the most comprehensive. The German original, published between 1956 and 1960, has four volumes with some 850 pages. Only the first two volumes are contained in the present American edition. They deal mainly with treason during World War II and range from Vidkun Quisling's and Knut Hamsun's betrayal of Norway to the German anti-Hitler resistance and the case of Dr. Otto John. It is to be hoped that the other two volumes, dealing with treason in the postwar period and specifically with the American attitude toward security and [illegible] will also be made available soon.

In saying that [illegible] a mass of source material the author [illegible] Stimulating is too weak a word [illegible] book. It is [illegible] self-confrontation, [illegible] values to which one has to [illegible].

On details one may agree or disagree with Miss Boveri. One may feel that some of her often brilliant character portraits are drawn too dark or some too bright. One may question some of the facts she lists and find some mistakes, such as the alleged suspension of the Bollingen Prize awards. But all this weighs little compared with the book's positive features. Here is a serious work by an author determined—and in a high degree succeeding—to get as close to the truth as is humanly possible.

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While Miss Boveri has drawn in vivid strokes a huge picture of "the landscape of treason" and its inhabitants, Alan Moorehead, in "The Traitors," examines the case histories of the three atomic scientists Allan Nunn May, Klaus Fuchs, and Bruno Pontecorvo, who, as he remarks, "chose with marvellous arrogance, to betray us for our own good." They betrayed with a clear conscience and with an "appalling ignorance" of right and wrong.

Mr. Moorehead's book is, with the exception of the preface, a reissue of his study of 1952. It is as penetrating and instructive today as it was 11 years ago; and its pertinence has not diminished.

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What May, Fuchs, and Pontecorvo have in common, apart from their motivation, is that they straddle the spheres of treason and espionage. They belonged to both.

The stories of those men and women who were predominantly or exclusively spies is told in Ronald Seth's "Anatomy of Spying," Christopher Felix's "A Short Course in the Secret War," and Allison Ind's "A Short History of Espionage."

Mr. Seth's scholarly background and personal experiences tell. He writes with thorough knowledge of his subject and with psychological insight. He avoids melodrama but mixes enough drama into his information on the international game of secret-snatching to satisfy seekers of vicarious thrills, who may not notice the occasional misspelling of names.

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Like Mr. Seth, the pseudonymous author of "A Short Course in the Secret War" has had firsthand field experience. He served as a United States intelligence agent in Hungary after the war and managed an escape project for Hungarian anti-Communist politicians in 1947. When the Communists, in the election of that year, blew up a 7 percent vote to 27 percent by means of faked ballots and outright terror, he had to include himself in his own project and to flee to safer territory.

His description of Communist tactics and the too often half-hearted countermoves of the Western powers is as [illegible] as it is saddening. His disclosure of the intricacies of espionage and counterespionage and their demands on the physical, intellectual, and moral resources of agents makes interesting reading.

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Mr. Ind, a retired colonel of the United States Army, for many years active in intelligence, has put together a few score of espionage stories from ancient times to our own days. Many of the stories have been told before. The author's habit of describing [illegible] occasional misreadings of the sources he used reduce the value of his book.

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